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GEN. WILLIAM R. PEERS
... Burma Road historian

Book Recalls Jungle War In Burma

By Bart Barnes
Staff Reporter

In December, 1942, a group of 20 men set up a base headquarters at Nazira, near the India-Burma border, to launch a guerrilla campaign against the Japanese in the mountain country of northern Burma.

The war had been going poorly for the Allies and General Joseph W. Stillwell, who had been driven out of Burma by the Japanese that spring, had no special instructions for the 20-man detachment other than to establish contact with the enemy and to begin espionage and guerrilla campaigns as soon as possible.

By the war's end, the force had grown to 1000 and was supplying and commanding a behind-the-lines army of nearly 10,000 Burmese. Staffed by Americans and British, it was the Office of Strategic Services' Detachment 101, a pioneer in the art of unconventional warfare and a model for the organization of the Army's present day Special Forces.

History Published

"Behind The Burma Road" a history of Detachment 101 was published Sept. 5 by Atlantic-Little, Brown of Boston. It was written by Brig. Gen. William R. Peers, a former commander, and Dean Breliis, a novelist and a lieutenant in the 101st.

Peers, now assistant division commander of the Fourth Infantry Division, Fort Lewis, Washington, wrote the first draft during the winter of 1961 while he was stationed in Washington as executive secretary of the Weapons Systems Evaluation Group.

Made up strictly of volunteers, the 101st was a young outfit. The average age of its officers was 26 while the average enlisted man's age was 23.

"Our men had to have a spirit of adventure and a quick mind," Peers says, but beyond that he refused to type them.

"Ordinary Little Guys"

"And we weren't all the muscular type. Some of our best men were just ordinary little guys," says Peers who played football and rugby as an undergraduate at U.C.L.A.

At the height of its operation, Detachment 101 was dropping 40 tons of supplies a day to guerrilla forces behind the Japanese lines.

Agents were dispatched as far as 200 miles behind the combat area and communications reached such peak efficiency that the Air Force could bomb an enemy target within 30 minutes after an agent had radioed back the coordinates.

Men in the Detachment were often behind the lines themselves on raiding or propaganda missions or to set up the guerrilla operations among the tribesmen of northern Burma.

During its 2½-year campaign, the Detachment claims 15,000 Japanese killed or wounded, 51 bridges destroyed, nine trains derailed, and 3700 tons of enemy supplies captured or destroyed.

Losses were 22 Americans, 270 native personnel, and 38 agents.